

Celebration Time

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It is time to celebrate the 100th birthday of the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) Laboratory. MDCH is the fifth oldest state health agency in the nation. In 1907, the legislature passed Act 109, which authorized the appointment of a bacteriologist and the "necessary appliances and apparatus..." With a budget of \$3,665, the Lansing lab was established in the old State building near the current capitol building. The Act of 1915 created a separate unrelated bacteriological lab in the Upper Peninsula, in Houghton. Due to the demands of WWI and other considerations, the labs combined in 1919 as the Bureau of Laboratories (BOL).

From its creation, the BOL has been at the forefront of community health. In the early 1920's, Michigan's death rate from diphtheria was the highest in the world (1,200 per year). The BOL developed its own preventative drug and distributed it free to doctors resulting in the death rate dropping to 37 per year by 1940. In the mid 1940's, goiter was so prevalent that it was known as "Michigan's Disease." Once again, through the efforts of the Bureau, iodine was added to table salt and simple goiter is now history in Michigan. Past achievements include the development of the Khan test for syphilis, an effective pertussis vaccine and the best smallpox vaccine. The BOL was the first to offer free plasma, the first to establish a biophysics lab, the first to develop an acellular rabies vaccine and the first to use Pulse Field Gel Electrophoresis.

Today, the BOL is still a leader in the field of public health, continuing proven practices and addressing emerging health issues. Exercises and drills are regularly run in conjunction with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and other partners to evaluate and improve laboratory preparedness across the state. The BOL has been working with the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan to get laboratories to report an estimated glomerular filtration rate on chemistry reports. These results will help identify early kidney disease in high-risk populations. To enhance local preparedness for chemical exposures, the Bureau has assembled a Chemical Terrorism Packaging and Shipping Kit. This kit has been distributed to hospitals and regional laboratories across Michigan. The BOL has worked with state and local public health and clinical partners to steadily reduce the prevalence of tuberculosis in Michigan to 2.5 cases/ 100,000 population, approximately one-half the nation's case rate in 2005, in part, by improving laboratory technology and reducing test turn around time.

The BOL leadership has initiated a paradigm shift regarding strategic planning. For the first time the entire staff was asked for input in developing a strategic plan. The staff became responsible for not only the plan's development, but also its implementation. This plan is not static tome, but a living document that will change to adapt to changing needs. From the first Director, M.L. Holm, to the current Director, Frances P. Downes, the Bureau of Laboratories continue to strive for excellence. Help us celebrate our achievements and our future. Your health is our mission.